

RAWDON'S RAID.

A STORY OF THE SNOW.

From London Society.

I.—In the Loose-Box.

The ancient hostler of "The Jocelyn Arms" led the way across the hard-frozen stable-yard to the loose-box in the corner; the two men from the Court followed.

"Fyle have gone out, Major," old Spavin grunted to the elder of the pair; "but he said 'twere likely you'd be down to see the mare; and so he left the key with me."

"All right!" the Major nodded between two little blue clouds of Cavendish. "Yes, I've brought down Mr. Jocelyn to look at her. Let Fyle know I'm here when he comes back—will you?" he added, when the old man had unlocked the creaking door.

Mr. Spavin took the hint and his departure. The Major and his friend, Dick Jocelyn, passed into the well-warmed and littered loose-box.

"There she is, Dick!" the mare's owner remarked, when the biting breath of that bitter winter's day had been shut out once more; "there she is! Worth coming here to look at, ain't she?"

Dick Jocelyn, usually a man of few words, wagged his handsome head affirmatively. The mare was rubbing her, with a low whinny of delight, against the Major's shoulder.

"Ah! Lucia, my little," Rawdon Darlington apostrophized his pet, patting her glossy neck; "you'll show them the way to-night—won't you?"

Lucia dropped her ears, and whinnied again for answer. The Hussar looked meaningly in his companion's face as he whistled a bar of "Young Lochinvar." Dick Jocelyn seemed to understand, and responded with an eloquent grin.

Then, from sheer habit, the two fell to discussing the mare's points for the next five minutes, offering sacrifices, as it were, to the genius loci. For both were thinking about a very different matter all the time. At last they made an end of all that, and were standing, the one leaning against the manger, the other against the wall, meeting each other's eyes, very much like a pair of Angurs.

"Well!" Dick Jocelyn said, breaking the silence with rather an injured air at its being left to his taciturn self to break it; "you'll have to do it, you know!"

"I think so," Darlington responded; "shortest way, and best way too. She couldn't stand another week of this sort of persecution. And I don't see how else I'm to put a stop to it, unless I have a row with him, which would be a bore, and might do no good after all."

"Make it all the worse!" Dick affirmed. "Jeff wouldn't fight you, you know; and he'd simply take it out of her, the end!"

Darlington's dark face grew darker, and his teeth closed ominously hard on the thick grey amber between them.

"I know that," he said. "I know that, Dick. That's what has made me quiet with her fellow so long. But that was before I knew she hated him, and—you understand?"

Jocelyn nodded. The other went on. "Now it's different. I've a right now to interfere if he annoys her; and I mean to, once for all. Only, as you say, the man won't fight; and I shall put it out of his power to revenge himself on her. There's only one way to do it, and that's this."

Dick signified assent in his favorite fashion. "Of course," Darlington continued. "I'm sorry to cause any annoyance to Lady Hope; to have to upset her plans, and deprive her of her chosen horse; but, under the circumstances, I don't know what else we're to do, your cousin and I. Lady Hope, you know, does me the honor to hate me very cordially. Natural enough she should when Mr. Marsden is her standard of perfection. I should have, as far as she is concerned, no chance whatever of winning in the usual way. Now I happen to have set my heart on winning this time, Marsden or no Marsden; and I simply mean to adopt my lady's motto, 'Every one for himself,' and act accordingly."

Rawdon pointed his words by a few more bars of "Young Lochinvar," while he knocked the tobacco-ash from the brown meerschaum bowl.

"Fancy I see the 'purr-fish bridegroom's' expressive countenance when he discovers you've bolted!" the grinning Dick felt constrained to say. "It was a simply heavenly idea of mine, this!"

He chuckled fondly over the "heavenly idea," and the vision he had conjured up, for a minute or two. Then, relapsing into his wonted impassibility of demeanor, he inquired: "To-night, eh?"

"That depends," the other answered, "on Fyle's report. I've sent him over to the Ashbridge Station to know if they will try and get the Paris mail through to-night. The line's blocked heavily between Ashbridge and Dover; but as they've been at work for the last two days, and there has been no wind to chance they will manage it. If they do, we're all right; if they don't, *partie remise*, that's all!"

"You're a jolly cool hand, Don!" Dick muttered, admiringly. "Said anything to her yet?"

"Not advisable till I've seen Fyle. No use in troubling her before her time, poor child! But I've had a little conversation with Mademoiselle Fanchon, who quite understands what she's got to do, and will be only too delighted to do it. The notion of a trip to Paris was her own."

"Good girl, that," observed Dick; "hates old Jeff like poison too." "Most women generally do manage to hate Mr. Marsden, somehow," Rawdon responded, "like most men. Well, Fanchon is all right, and will see about baggage. She'll join us at Ashbridge under Fyle's escort, if the business is to be done to-night."

"And the way we arranged holds good?" "Barring accidents or anything unforeseen in Fyle's report—presently—yes. There's some one riding into the yard now. He's come back, I dare say."

The Major pushed open the door and looked out. "I thought so, Dick," he said. "Here he is."

A man in a groom's undress, with "soldier" stamped upon him unmistakably, was swinging himself off his horse and bawling for Mr. Spavin.

"Here, Fyle!" Rawdon called, as the ancient hostler came shivering and shambling out of the warm tap-room and took the Hussar's bridle. Mr. Fyle turned, made his appearance in Lucia's loose-box the next minute, and, subsequently, his soldier-like report, and the line would be clear enough of snow, the Ashbridge station-master had told him, by an early hour the next morning to admit of an attempt, at all events, being made to get the long delayed Paris mail through to Dover, supposing, of course, no fresh fall took place and no wind came on to occasion a fresh drift. The mail was expected in such case to reach

Ashbridge about 4 A. M.; and Mr. Fyle had taken upon himself to secure a compartment for his master. Below Ashbridge the rails were reported free; so that if the train got as far as that station there was no likelihood of its being blocked up again further on.

On this Mr. Fyle had certain orders given him; and then Rawdon Darlington, Major of "Ours," and his friend, Dick Jocelyn the Guardsman, walked, talking rather earnestly together, through the straggling streets of the Kentish village where the last red rays of the wintry afternoon sun were gleaming on frosted window panes, and so through the lower gates and the long avenue of snow-draped elms back to Dane Court.

Ex-private John Fyle watched them a brief while, stroking his moustache as he had seen his master stroke his. "Ah!" he thought aloud, as he turned away; "that's the Major's little game, is it? And a very pretty little game, too!"

"Hilda! You love him?" "Helen!"

Miss Jocelyn's confession in two words, made with such a piteous little sigh, such a tell-tale hiding of a blush-rose face in her confessor's lap! The said confessor looked grave; but stroked the penitent's fair hair fondly and forgivingly enough, notwithstanding.

Then there was silence for a space in that little chamber where the cousins sat that wintry gloaming over the log-fire. Cousin Helen's room, they called it at Dane Court. It looked over the lawn upon the park and the great elms of the Long avenue, up which Dick Jocelyn and his friend were walking just then, after their visit to Lucia's loose-box.

It was of one of those two out there in the snow that Helen Carey and Hilda Jocelyn had been talking for the last half-hour, till their talk had ended in that last question and answer we have overheard. It began again, of course, in a minute or two. Naturally it couldn't be let to die there.

"My poor darling!" Helen said, bending over the golden head nestling in the folds of her dress, "when?"

"Always, I think, always, since that first night I saw him. Oh, Nell, I couldn't help it!"—as though the child anticipated rebuke, and was trying to depreciate it.

But the other hadn't, apparently, the heart to be hard with the criminal. Nay, she bent over her pet closer, and put her hands under the criminal's cheek and chin, and lifted up the flushed, tear-stained little face, and kissed it. That kiss was absolution in full. Hilda felt that; so the tears fell faster. Helen let them have their way awhile before she said:—

"That was six months ago, Mignonne. I remember; at that ball at Prince's Gate. Dick brought him there. Just after you had let them tie you to the other it must have been. O Hilda, why did you ever let them?"

As if Mignonne had ever had a chance against mamma. That match between her daughter and Jeffrey Marsden, the city banker, had been a pet project of Lady Hope's always; it was so likely any objection on the child's part to the arrangement would have carried weight! My lady's law, as she proclaimed to all her world, was word; Hilda had never in all her life dared dream of disobedience, as she told her confessor now.

"What could I do?" she pleaded. "Mamma said I was to take him, and he asked me—O Nell, his cold, hard voice made me shiver—and I did as I was told. And then he came—Rawdon. And then I knew what I had done. We went away to Homburg, mamma and I; and I tried not to think about him. It was no use, Nell. He came to Homburg, too, with Dick. Mamma was terribly angry with me because he did. And I deserved it, for I was so happy! He never said a word to me any body might have heard; but I thought—but I knew he cared for me before we went away. I don't know whether Mr. Marsden fancied anything; but in his key way I know he hated him. Mamma said cruel things to me about him. I didn't mind; I was so happy—happy in such a strange painful way, dear!—to think he cared for me, my brave, strong Rawdon! Then we came home. O Nell, I thought I should have died that night I said good-bye to him; the last night I should ever see him, perhaps! We came home. I think if I hadn't got ill, and you hadn't come down here to nurse me and fight for me, mamma would have had me married to Mr. Marsden in the autumn. As it was, I got a respite till now. And now I can't do it! I won't do it!" poor Hilda sobbed out.

The elder girl's soft voice and loving hands soothed her tenderly. "I begin to think you mustn't, Mignonne," Helen said. "And if you mustn't, you shan't! But let me hear the end of it. How came Major Darlington down here this Christmas?"

Mignonne smiled through her tears. "Dick brought him again," she answered. "Dear old Dick! He's been so good to me, in his quiet, cool fashion, all the time. I think he and Rawdon are bosom friends; you know, like you and me; they've no secrets from each other; and—"

"I see!" Helen nodded. "And, moreover, Dick detests the Croons. Yes, I quite understand."

"And you know," Hilda went on, "mamma never quarrels with him, somehow; and Dane Court really belongs to him; so when she found Rawdon in the drawing-room one day, just before you came back, dressed for dinner, and Dick told her he'd brought him down for the shooting, why, she had to accept the situation. Only she wrote off to Mr. Marsden, I think, to come down too, a fortnight sooner than had been arranged. And before he came—"

Mignonne made pause here. The fair little face paled and flushed; the golden head began to droop again. It was clear enough to Miss Carey what had happened before Jeff Marsden came.

"He spoke to you? You let him, Mignonne?" "Let him! Do you think I could stop him, Helen? I hadn't the power—nor the will, perhaps. Yes, he did speak to me; he did tell me he loved me! And I listened to him."

She lifted her head up with a sudden, proud little gesture, and looked her questioner fairly in the eyes.

"I listened to him," she went on—"listened to every word that he said, and shiver, and grow faint, to every low, passionate word he spoke, as you would never think his voice could speak. He loved me, my own! His own lips were telling me so; how could I not listen? I was his, he said; no other man's. His own—was it not so? Ah! he had no need to ask. I was his! I am his, not this other man's."

Passion transformed the child's face so that there was upon it something of my lady's "determined" look while she spoke those last words.

"You never can be the other man's now, Mignonne," Helen said presently, when the Major's wooing had been circumstantially described, and there were no more questions to be asked. "But you must tell Aunt Hope what has happened."

"Tell mamma? I daren't, Helen. She's set her heart on my marrying her Croons. And, besides, she can't bear Rawdon."

"For all that, if you don't tell her, Rawdon must. Or I; I'm not afraid of her."

"But Rawdon says she mustn't be told yet, nor Mr. Marsden."

"Have you forgotten what this day fortnight was to have been?" Mignonne gave a little shudder. "You would have been Mrs. Marsden by this time, poor child! He thinks you are to be, still. He's a right to think so, Hilda, till you tell him you've changed your mind. And you must tell him."

"Don't say no!" she replied, defiantly. "My mamma is too strong against us as it is."

"What are you going to do, then?" Miss Carey asked, rather impatiently. "Whatever Don tells me, dear," Mignonne said. "Leave it all to him."

"I must have a little talk with this automatic Don," Helen said to herself. There came a knock at the door. "May I come in, Helen?" Dick Jocelyn's voice asked.

"Of course," Helen answered, and Dick entered. He went straight up to the log-fire and stirred it into a blaze. Then he leaned tranquilly against the low mantel-piece and warmed himself.

"Cold, ain't it?" he said. "Come in to tell you we've arranged about the sledges for to-night. Don will drive one of you, and I the other. I've told my lady about it."

"What did she say?" questioned Helen, glancing at Hilda.

"Objected, of course. She always objects, you know. However, I managed to convince her that she couldn't get more than four people into the carriage—herself, old Jeff, and the two Pierpoint women. She couldn't very well offer to send them in a sledge; besides, Don and I wouldn't have 'em at any price. We don't mind driving you two. I told my lady so."

"On n'est plus flatter, Monsieur!" "No, is one? Well, my lady suggested the carriage should come back for you. I said she might think herself lucky if it got her to the Booties' on a night like this, with the snow drifted a dozen feet deep, at all. Then she wouldn't go. Next!" I told her; but we meant to go—you should have seen Jeff's face when I said that, Hilda?—for the fun of the thing. And, besides, what would the Booties' think if she stopped away, when they came to her with four horses and a snow-plough? At last she dropped into my plan. You and Hilda are to be sleighed over. Old Jeff, it seems, has more confidence in my skill than in Don's, so I'm to take Mignonne, and you'll have to trust yourself to him."

"Oh!" remarked Helen, seeing an opportunity for her little tale.

"Yes," Dick returned. "Crumple your ball-dresses a bit the buffalo-robe will; but it's the only way of getting there to-night, I do believe. Suppose you want to go?"

"Yes, of course!" both girls cried quickly. "All right; then. Start at ten. Don's had a mare he had in Canada sent over from the Barrocks expressly for the occasion; and it's a splendid night."

Dick moved away from the mantel-piece as if he were going. Instead of that, however, he dropped into a chair, and although the unwelcome eloquence he had indulged in had knocked him up. He smoothed Hilda's golden hair rather more fondly than usual, too, as he said:—

"Go and get me a robe for my coat out of the conservatory, Mignonne, will you?" She looked up at him inquiringly. He drew her head closer, and whispered in her ear. A stage whisper, though; Helen heard what he said.

"Don't be there, darling! My lady's dressing; so are the other women; and old Jeff's writing in the library for his life to save the post. Don wants to speak to you."

She gave a little cry, and ran out of the room. "Dick!" Helen said, reproachfully. "Pooh!" returned that individual. "Hasn't she been telling you all about it? Thought so. And you don't suppose I'm going to let her marry that grey old fellow, Jeff Marsden—do you? I'd have stopped that little game of my lady's at first if I'd been on the spot. 'O my going to stop it now. Awful fun it'll be!"

"What do you mean?" "Going to tell you. You're a sensible girl, Helen, and worth the trouble. Sit down and listen."

Miss Carey sat down, and did listen. Dick began to unfold a conspiracy. When the dressing-bell rang, Mignonne hadn't come back, and Dick was talking away still.

"I think it a most objectionable proceeding, and I repeat that it is my wish that you do not go!"

He who spoke was a grim, gaunt, grizzled personage, with a voice that grated on your nerves like a hand-saw; with thin, bloodless lips and freezing, steel-blue eyes; clothed in severe evening-dress; and a choking collar and a creaking cravat, and a decidedly bad temper. He was Jeffrey Marsden, banker, of Lombard street and Roehampton; and, having managed to catch her alone for five minutes in the Dane Court drawing-room before the expedition started for the Booties' ball, he was haranguing the fair-haired child, whom he counted on having in another fortnight undisputed right to haraigue for the rest of her natural life, in his most autocratic manner, though with hardly the same effect as usual. He was Jeffrey Marsden, banker, of Lombard street and Roehampton; and, having managed to catch her alone for five minutes in the Dane Court drawing-room before the expedition started for the Booties' ball, he was haranguing the fair-haired child, whom he counted on having in another fortnight undisputed right to haraigue for the rest of her natural life, in his most autocratic manner, though with hardly the same effect as usual.

"My wish, my request, that you give up this ball, under the circumstances!" enunciated Croons, after an emphatic pause, and setting down an empty coffee-cup.

"Give up this ball?" Hilda repeated—and he was vaguely conscious that she spoke in a different way, somehow, to her usual one towards him. "Why?"

Marsden looked at her over the creaking cravat as one who finds a difficulty in understanding what he hears, or fancies he can scarcely hear at all.

"I beg your pardon," he said, in his most idly rasping tone; "you asked me—"

"I asked you why I should give up this ball?" "She met his hard eyes quite steadily. He looked at her in real surprise.

"Did you not hear me say it was my wish, and grow faint, to every low, passionate word he spoke, as you would never think his voice could speak. He loved me, my own! His own lips were telling me so; how could I not listen? I was his, he said; no other man's. His own—was it not so? Ah! he had no need to ask. I was his! I am his, not this other man's."

tell me at the last moment that I am not to go to-night for no better reason than to parade your authority over me—an authority to which you have no right either."

"He turned very white, but stood speechless. She went on—

"An authority you claim, I know, but which you have done nothing to gain. What have you ever been at the pains to win from me? And now you 'command' me! It is too late!"

"Flat rebellion this, beyond question. Fool that he was to try and crush it with the heavy hand as he thought he could do!"

"Enough, if you please!" he said, with what he flattered himself was irresistible severity; "I can listen to no more of this. Once more, and for the last time, I distinctly and formally forbid your going to this ball to-night. Be good enough to let that suffice."

How little he knew what he was really doing at that moment! Couldn't he almost see, though, in the face she turned towards him?

"I shall suffice!" she said. "Distinctly and formally I refuse to be forbidden. For the last time, as you say."

Before he could find his voice again, there came a sound of other voices from beyond the portières. The other women had come down. This pleasant little *été-à-été* was going to be interrupted. And she had defied him! This penniless child he thought he had broken so thoroughly to his hand had defied him, Jeffrey Marsden, the millionaire, who had actually condescended to ask her to be his wife! What did it mean? What could he have come to try? And what was he to do? She had set his express commands at naught; she evidently was determined to have her own way and go.

His cold blood ran almost warm under the sense of his defeat. But he was so utterly taken by surprise that he could only mutter awkwardly enough something about "Lady Hope" and "to-morrow" before the others were in the room. To-morrow! He remembered afterwards the smile that crossed the girl's pale face when he talked of that.

(Concluded to-morrow.)

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Total amount of Policies issued in 1868, \$1,000,000.00

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Assets of the Company Jan 1, 1869. Real Estate, \$100,000.00

City of Philadelphia, \$100,000.00

Real Estate, \$100,000.00